



Fairfield University

Office of the President

Mark R. Nemec, PhD
President

**Testimony for the
Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
Mark R. Nemec, PhD
President & Professor of Politics
Fairfield University
March 2, 2023**

On behalf of Fairfield University and as a scholar who has extensively researched the societal role of higher education in creating civic capital and fostering economic competitiveness, I am submitting testimony on Section 12 of [S.B. 982](#): **AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING HIGHER EDUCATION** which seeks to make permanent our institution's exemption from academic program approval by the Office of Higher Education, without a cap on the number of programs we may introduce without approval.

By way of background, non-profit, private colleges that are regionally accredited and maintain certain standards have been exempt from academic program approval by the Office of Higher Education in some form since 2016. At times there have been caps on the number of programs that an institution which is exempt may introduce but for the last two years, eligible institutions have had no cap on the number of new programs we may introduce. This bill seeks to make permanent that existing policy.

Connecticut is one of only a handful of states that require private, non-profit colleges to seek state approval for its new programs. It is the **ONLY** state in the country that requires program approval for private colleges and not public colleges.

It is important that Fairfield University is provided the flexibility to offer new programs without oversight to be responsive to the state's workforce needs. It is essential to our ability to provide students and the greater community with innovative programs and necessary skills to create positive change.

Fairfield University has seen no impact on student outcomes with our exemption from program approval. The University's program approval process is rigorous and efficient and includes a thorough review of program description, objectives, impact, administrative structure and governance, and more, in addition to final approval by all executive level department heads.

Policymakers may have consumer protection concerns about this issue, given recent news related to the sudden closure of a for-profit institution in our state. It is important to understand that this statutory provision for exemption requires institutions to be regionally accredited.

Universities like Fairfield undergo significant and comprehensive accreditation evaluations that are conducted by individuals and teams deeply immersed in higher education standards. Fairfield submits an Annual Report to the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) with updates and undergoes rigorous self-studies.

Beyond the regional accreditors, our programs undergo rigorous evaluation by organizations including but not limited to, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), the Accreditation Board of Engineering and Technology (ABET), the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE), and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).

Fairfield University has risen to new heights over the last 30 years – recognized as one of the best investments in American higher education and one of the most respected Jesuit Catholic institutions in the country. Recently, Fairfield University moved into the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education's Doctoral Universities category and entered the Best National Universities ranking for the first time placing among U.S News & World Report's Top 125 Best National Universities. The University was the top-ranked institution among schools that moved into the National Universities category, placing at #115, and #29 nationally for Best Undergraduate Teaching Universities.

Fairfield's reputation for excellence is also reflected in the record number of applications we are receiving, and our admit rate declining. Our ability to attract talented students to our university and to this state is predicated on our ability to offer a range of programs which help students prepare for life after graduation. Fairfield and our fellow independent colleges and universities must remain flexible and adaptable in order to effectively prepare even more students for the professional world. Making our exemption from program approval permanent is important to students, faculty and employers.

We appreciate your continued support as we continue to be a relevant, sustainable and powerful resource to our state's economic success.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark R. Nemec". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Mark R. Nemec, PhD
President
Professor of Politics